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# THE INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY

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## EARLY COMMERCE IN INDIANA.

THE resources of Indiana were for years almost wholly agricultural,\* and the citizen was, to the greatest possible degree, self-supporting and self-sufficient within the limits of a very narrow life. The farm supplied the farmer not only with most of the food that went upon his table, but with flax and wool for his clothing and hides for his shoes. He was, not infrequently, his own tanner and shoemaker; with his ax and draw-knife and shaving-horse, supplemented, perhaps, by a "burning-iron" for an auger, he was as often cabinet-maker as husbandman, possessing, indeed, a versatility and resourcefulness that, considering his scant equipment, was astonishing. The housewife and her daughters not only cut and made the family garments, but spun and wove the fabrics for the same. The immense advantage of division of labor by expert specialists which, along with improved machinery, has at the present so multiplied and cheapened commodities, they practically entirely missed, though a step in this direction was the itinerant "spinners" and shoemakers, told of by some chroniclers, who went from home to home plying their trades where required.

But with all this self-sufficiency with which the average pioneer began life in the new country, he was by no means independent of the advantages of civilization, and his dependence increased as, with thrift, his wants increased. Of a large class few were satisfied with spicebrush tea and parched grain coffee, with wholly home-made clothes and conveniences, and with the total absence of finery and luxury. In copies of the *Vincennes Sun* of 1816 we find sundry modest advertisements of unspecified merchandise. These advertisements rapidly grow in number and in length. In the file of the following year appears

\*The principal articles of trade are horses, mules, cattle, swine, flour, corn, whisky and lumber, which are either exchanged at home for foreign goods, or transported for sale to the southern market.—*Indiana Gazette*, 1823, p. 13.

a goodly variety of commodities, comprising dry goods, hardware, fine boots and shoes, millinery and hats, saddlery, whisky and salt. In 1818 commercial advertisements occupy large and conspicuous place in the pages of the *Sun*, and these continue to increase in diversity.

Indianapolis, where the difficulties of importing were far more serious than at Vincennes, and the trade of which may be fairly regarded as representing the social necessities, was hardly behind Vincennes. In the earliest local paper accessible to us—*The Western Censor and Emigrant's Guide*—we find, two years after the founding of the town, the advertisement of Conner, Tyner & Co., whose stock includes “cloths, cassimeres, baize, cassinets, flannels, blankets, bombazetts, robes, dress shawls, calicoes, cambrick, muslins, shirtings, vesting, hosiery, nankeens, handkerchiefs, umbrellas and parasols, plaids, stripes and chambrays, linen, hats, combs, bonnets, shoes—black, coloured and morocco, spoons, knives and forks, saws, files, saddlery, school books, butcher, shoe and pen knives, chissels, gouges and plane bits, hammers and hatchets, hinges and screws, padlocks, latchets, spades, shovels, tongs, cotton and wool cards, augers, &c., &c. Also, queensware and glassware, groceries, powder, lead and shot, iron, steel and nails, chalk and Spanish whiting, tinware, &c., &c.”\*

Elsewhere we find coffees, teas, sugars, wines and other spirits, drugs and nostrums, segars, tobaccos and pipes, indigo and foreign dye stuffs, oils, soaps, spices, confectionery, trunks, musical instruments, stationery and books, shad and mackerel, watches and clocks, 10-plate stoves,† patent ploughs, mill furnishings and other articles representing the importations of the country.

\*Of all the imports none was considered more important than whisky and salt, and the same paper quoted sees fit to announce with a capitalized heading and an exclamation point, the following important item of news:

“KEEL BOAT NEWS!

“Arrived at the landing opposite Indianapolis, on Saturday last, Keel Boat Dandy, with 28 ton cargo, consisting of Salt and Whisky, the property of S. and D. Miller, of Maysville.”

†*First Stove in Wabash*.—The first stove in Wabash county was purchased in Pittsburg, Pa., by Arch Stitt, taken to the Ohio river and conveyed by bateau to the Wabash and up that river to Lafayette. From that place the trip to the Stitt home in Rich Valley was made by way of the old canal. The stove was an exceedingly heavy affair, with three raises, or steps, and both the pipe and stove were great curiosities to the neighbors, who drove several miles to see them. Other stoves were introduced soon afterward, but fire-places and ovens, the latter outside of the house, continued in use many years later.—*Wabash Plain Dealer*.

This description from Young's History of Wayne County (p. 63) presents a vivid picture of the pioneer store:

"Smith's store, inside, would be regarded by most of our readers as a curiosity shop. Here was a rude counter; there were a few shelves fixed up to the log wall. On these were seen packages of Barlow knives, with a sample knife outside for a sign; sheep shears done up in the same manner; also gimlets, augers, etc. There were sickles wherewith to cut the first crops of wheat, hair sieves, trace chains, blind bridles, curry-combs, and numerous other necessities for the farmers. Nor were the wants of their wives and daughters forgotten. They there found calico, fine cambric, cap-stuff, pins, needles, etc. Here were sold some of the first wedding garments for the settlers' daughters, and here was kept also a small stock of imported broadcloth, but rather too fine for many to wear. Occasionally a young man who wished to appear in a coat of blue cloth, with yellow metal buttons, a high and rolling collar, and a forked tail, after the fashion of those days, got his outfit here. Smith increased his stock from time to time, to supply the demand of the constantly increasing population, and being for several years the only merchant in the county, he acquired an extensive and lucrative trade." This was in Richmond, in 1810. Smith was said to have brought his first stock by pack-saddle from Cincinnati or from Eaton, O. The wagon trips, later, to Cincinnati for goods required from six to ten days. The number of these stores and the extensiveness of their stocks, despite the risks and expense of securing them, shows that even in those days in a material sense as well as spiritually, man could not live to himself alone. But the difficulty of getting supplies was sometimes too great for even the most urgent demand to overcome. The desperate straits attendant upon isolation is well illustrated by the following account given by Robert Dale Owen in a little book on Plank Roads (p. 20). Though the story is located in Illinois it might as readily have applied to Indiana. "Last winter," he says, "the inhabitants of McLeansboro, a small town in southern Illinois, some forty or fifty miles northwest of Shawneetown, found themselves, in consequence of the miserable condition of the roads around them, cut off from all supplies and thus deprived of coffee, sugar and other necessities of

life. Tempting offers were made to several teamsters, but none of them would stir from home. At last a farmer in the neighborhood declared that he had a team of four horses that no mud could daunt, and that he would risk a trip to Shawneetown and bring back the necessary supplies. Ten days elapsed, and his empty wagon was slowly and painfully dragged into town by two drooping and jaded horses scarcely to be recognized as part of the fresh and spirited team that started on this expedition. Their owner, by great exertions, had reached Shawneetown, where he took in about half a load. Two of his horses were killed in the attempt to return, his load was left, perforce, on the road, and the surviving horses were so worn down by the trip as to be unfit for use during the rest of the winter."

Judge D. D. Banta, in his history of Johnson county, tells of a teamster who, hauling a load of goods to an Indianapolis merchant, had to roll off and leave in the woods a barrel of salt which, owing to the continued "horrible" condition of the road, remained there till the barrel went to staves, and "one of the most celebrated 'dry licks' ever known in the county was the consequence."

The securing of the money wherewith to purchase supplies was sometimes no less difficult. In the transforming of the surplus wealth of the country into this wealth from abroad the producer was at every disadvantage. His overplus of hogs, cattle and grain were a drug until he got them to a distant market, and even then the price was wholly out of proportion to the labor and cost of getting them there. The hauling of a load of wheat for perhaps more than a hundred miles over quagmire roads was an arduous undertaking, aside from several days' time consumed, and instances are told of farmers who, after this drive to Madison or Cincinnati, turned about disgusted at the low prices offered and hauled their loads back home in hopes of better returns later. Nor was the urging of a drove of reluctant hogs over the same road less laborious. That they might be equal to the trip, we are told, they were sometimes put into a field "where men employed for the purpose drove them back and forth for several days in order to train them for driving on the road.\* Their condition as to fatness after this "training" and

\*D. D. Banta in *Indianapolis News*, June 8, 1888.

the following long drive to market may be guessed at. The cost of drovers and the expenses upon the road cut down the margin of profit no little, and after the market was reached the owner was subject to the depressed prices of an almost illimitable supply that flowed from all parts of a vast hog-producing area. And what was true of hogs was true of other animals that found their way to market by foot as the easiest way of transportation.

Or, if the settler was so located that he could take advantage of navigable water and float his produce down by flat-boat, while he could carry on the craft many times more than by his wagon, the risks of loss were multiplied; his market was far-off New Orleans, the time occupied was weeks instead of days, and the expense back with his proceeds, whether by steamboat or, as some chose, by foot or horse, through hundreds of miles of wilderness, carried with it both expense and risk.

Again, if he sold at home, the limited market, glutted with an over-supply of such things as he produced, afforded him next to nothing. Some of the prices quoted are ridiculously low: Dressed pork, \$1.00 per hundred; wheat, 37½ cents per bushel; corn, 10 to 25 cents; oats, 8 to 12½ cents; butter, 3 to 8 cents per pound; eggs, 3 to 5 cents per dozen; chickens, 50 to 75 cents per dozen; turkeys, 15 to 25 cents each, and wild meats, skins and ginseng, which were made tributary to the income, at proportionate rates. Young cattle are given as low as \$2.50 each; milch cows, \$5.00 to \$10.00, and good work horses at \$25.00 to \$50.00.\*

These products disposed of at these rates were not even sold for cash, but, for the most part, exchanged for high-priced imports, such as muslin at 50 cents per yard; common calico at 37½ cents, and other fabrics, as well as tea, coffee, etc., in proportion. It required about a bushel of oats to buy a pound of nails; a bushel of wheat or two bushels of corn to buy a yard of calico or a pound of coffee. Maurice Thompson, in his "Stories of Indiana," (p. 209) says that "a yard of silk cost as much as eighty bushels of corn would sell for. Calico was exchanged at the rate of one yard for eight bushels of corn. Good broadcloth

\*See D. D. Banta's smaller history of Johnson County, pp. 67-69; Young's Wayne County, pp. 62-63; and Elliott's Evansville and Vanderburg County, pp. 98-99.

commanded one hundred bushels of corn per yard." Under these conditions the commonest queensware and pewter on the table were more objects of pride than cut glass and sterling silver at the present day; the few ounces of tea were treasured for special company occasions; the girl's dress of calico was kept for Sunday wear, and was kept long, regardless of change of style in Paris; while the broadcloth suit with which the young man, if he made pretense to gentility, equipped himself for his wedding was, in the words of Judge Banta, "to be the suit of his life and to last for dry-weather Sunday wear for many years."

The reasons for these high prices are not far to seek. Some of the difficulties of the importer, even in the more accessible parts of the State, are set forth in Elliott's History of Evansville and Vanderburg County (pp. 98-100). The early merchants in that section awaited their supplies from eastern markets as a coast merchant might the return of the sailing vessels from foreign ports. "Articles of wearing apparel, cloth, cutlery, etc., had to be purchased in such markets as Baltimore and Philadelphia, and hauled over the mountains to Pittsburg in wagons, and from there boated down to the villages on the Ohio river." As a result, the transportation tariff added to the original cost made the articles almost prohibitory except for the well-to-do. Nails, for example, were so high that few were used in the construction of the log houses or upon the farm at all. The wagon-maker managed to use not more than two or three pounds of these in making a wagon-bed, and the blacksmith very often made his own horseshoe nails. This, it must be borne in mind, was immediately on the Ohio, the great artery of western commerce. When, after leaving the river, goods had to be wagoned far into the interior, it is evident that the inequalities of exchange must be increased. The wagon rates, for example, from the falls of the Ohio to Terre Haute were \$1.50 per hundred pounds.

Something of a factor in the exchange and distribution of commodities was the peddler, who, by wagon or afoot, carried on his itinerant traffic. Elliott, in his History of Vanderburg County, gives an account of the origin and service of the peddling system in his section. Enterprising merchants and traders of the East, he tells us, "started peddling wagons all through

this section. These wagons contained all sorts of supplies that were sold to the farmers for cash or traded for eggs, chickens, turkeys, feathers, butter, and even bacon. In fact these peddlers would take anything that they could dispose of in the Eastern markets, in exchange for their goods. The pack peddlers also followed the country roads and were merchants in their small way. In the early history of the settlements of this section the pack peddlers were mostly Irishmen or Scotchmen. The tramp artisan was also a means of transportation, but he only carried small supplies with which repairs of tinware, etc., were made. Pack-horses and donkeys were not infrequently seen on the highway."

GEORGE S. COTTMAN.

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### EARLY WAGON TRANSPORTATION.

[From an interview with William McFarland, of Indianapolis, who, during the thirties, hauled merchandise from the Ohio river markets.]

THE old-time teamsters were proud of their calling and of their teams, and by way of expressing their pride, frequently put bows over the hames hung with small bells, and with a number of these bows, aggregating perhaps a score and a half of bells to a team, they lumbered through the mud to a perpetual *melange* of melody. In addition they sometimes put over the hames broad housings or shoulder protectors of bear-skin dressed with the hair on, and a horse thus equipped was as vain as a rustic dandy. It was an unwritten law of the road that if a man stalled, and another teamster could haul him out with the same number of horses, the latter was entitled to the bells and housings of the weaker team. The driver never occupied a seat on the wagon, but always rode the "near" horse, and armed with a long "blacksnake" whip, tipped with a silken lash that cracked viciously, managed the pulling power of his team with a skill that approached a fine art.

Bad roads were the bane of those days, and the varying condition of these had much to do with the size of the load that